DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 288 240 EA 019 712

TITLE Evaluating the Chief School Administrator: Fulfilling the Board's Governance Responsibility.
INSTITUTION New Jersey School Boards Association, Trenton.
PUB DATE May 87
NOTE 15p.; Paper presented at the Action Lab of the New Jersey School Boards Association (West Windsor, NJ, May 9, 1987).
PUB TYPE Guides - Non-Classroom Use (055) -- Reports - Descriptive (141)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Administrator Evaluation; Administrators; *Board Administrator Relationship; *Board of Education Role; Communication Skills; Elementary Secondary Education; *Evaluation Methods; Governance; Leadership Qualities; Policy Formation; Rating Scales; State Legislation; Summative Evaluation; *Superintendents
IDENTIFIERS *Evaluation Standards; *New Jersey

ABSTRACT

Evaluating the chief school administrator's performance is one of the most important responsibilities of a board of education. In New Jersey, established guidelines for board evaluations of superintendents range from legal to procedural in the attempt to meet school district goals and objectives and to assess whether the superintendency fulfilled the responsibilities and accomplished the board's objectives to its satisfaction. This approach to superintendent evaluation includes, first, school board self-evaluations in order to assess the success of the governance/management relationship and, second, demonstration of the superintendent's executive skills through documents that reflect a clear, concise, appropriate, easily measured "summary of ratings" of superintendent's performance. The final part of the New Jersey evaluation process, measuring a superintendent's progress toward district goals and objectives, requires the following: (1) listing objectives as written statements; (2) setting target dates for stages and steps in the evaluative process; (3) developing action plans for each objective; (4) monitoring progress during the school year; and (5) evaluating the results to judge staff and program effectiveness for which the superintendent is ultimately responsible, and by which an annual summary conference will provide a summative evaluation. (JAM)

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EVALUATING THE CHIEF SCHOOL ADMINISTRATOR: FULFILLING THE BOARD'S GOVERNANCE RESPONSIBILITY

Paper presented at the Action Lab of the New Jersey School Boards Association in West Windsor, New Jersey on May 9, 1987.

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EVALUATING THE CHIEF SCHOOL ADMINISTRATOR: FULFILLING THE BOARD'S GOVERNANCE RESPONSIBILITY

Evaluating the Chief School Administrator is one of the most important responsibilities of a board of education. Boards, in general, are reluctant to carry out this important responsibility because they aren't sure how to proceed; they lack knowledge on the subject; their relationship with the superintendent is often adversarial, resulting in an annual evaluation that is confrontational.

A confrontation can be avoided entirely or kept to a bare minimum if the board establishes a clear set of expectations which would include: adoption of the goals and objectives to be accomplished; the instruments to be used; and a policy outlining the process to be followed. These procedural steps must be agreed to, in advance, by the board and the superintendent.

The evaluation of the Chief School Administrator begins when the board establishes the goals and objectives and holds the CSA accountable for progress towards those goals and objectives. The board cannot hold the superintendent accountable for those things that he or she did not know was to be accomplished.

By establishing what is to be accomplished; what is involved in achieving the accomplishments; and by reviewing progress reports on a regular basis, the evaluation becomes a tool to help the board fulfill its responsibility to govern the district.

The board's responsibility to evaluate can be found in the New Jersey School Member Code of Ethics where it says:

> "I WILL RECOGNIZE THAT MY RESPONSIBILITY IS NOT TO RUN THE SCHOOLS BUT, TOGETHER WITH MY FELLOW BOARD MEMBERS, TO SEE THAT THEY ARE WELL RUN."

As board members, you carry out this important responsibility when you make important <u>decisions and judgements</u> about:

(1) WHAT IS TO BE TAUGHT;
(2) WHETHER WHAT IS SUPPOSED TO BE TAUGHT IS BEING LEARNED; AND
(3) WHETHER THE RESOURCES NEEDED FOR LEARNING ARE AVAILABLE AND BEING USED AS EFFICIENTLY AS POSSIBLE.

Having made these <u>decisions</u>, the superintendent has the responsibility to see that they are implemented. The board, having set the <u>directions</u>, must now make sure the district stays on course.

Keep in mind your superintendent is special. Overall, the <u>superintendent's performance</u> probably has more to do with <u>district progress</u>, <u>community satisfaction</u>, and the <u>board's peace of mind</u> than any other single factor. The board's relationship with its superintendent is critical to his or her performance. A good relationship is founded on common understanding and mutual respect. Together, that adds up to trust. Maintaining trust requires a systematic and continuous flow of information between those governing the

district and those managing implementation of governance decisions. The board can govern when it knows what its superintendent is going to do and whether it's getting done. The superintendent can manage when he or she knows what the board expects.

The board also has a legal responsibility to evaluate the CSA. New Jersey Administrative Code (N.J.A.C. 6:3-1.22) requires boards of education to evaluate, annually, the tenured CSA. Non-tenured CSA's should be evaluated three (3) times per year (N.J.A.C. 6:3-1.19) by virtue of their status as "teaching staff" members (N.J.A.S.A. 18A:1.1).

The purpose of the annual evaluation, according to the Administrative Code, is to:

(1) PROMOTE PROFESSIONAL EXCELLENCE AND IMPROVE THE SKILLS OF THE CHIEF SCHOOL ADMINISTRATOR;
(2) IMPROVE THE QUALITY OF THE EDUCATION RECEIVED BY THE PUPILS SERVED BY THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS;
(3) PROVIDE A BASIS FOR THE REVIEW OF THE PERFORMANCE OF THE TENURED CHIEF SCHOOL ADMINISTRATOR.

A fourth purpose could be:

(4) TO IMPROVE COMMUNICATIONS BETWEEN THE BOARD AND THE SUPERINTENDENT.

In addition, the code identifies the following responsibilities of a board of education:

(1) ADOPT POLICY AND PROCEDURES FOR THE EVALUATION
(2) DEVELOP JOB DESCRIPTION AND EVALUATION CRITERIA
(3) DETERMINE WHAT METHODS OF COLLECTING DATA WILL BE USED
(4) PREPARE INDIVIDUAL PLAN FOR PROFESSIONAL GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT
(5) CONDUCT ANNUAL SUMMARY CONFERENCE BETWEEN CSA AND A MAJORITY OF THE BOARD
(6) PREPARE WRITTEN PERFORMANCE REPORT WITH INPUT FROM MAJORITY OF THE BOARD (AUTHORED BY BOARD PRESIDENT).

A comprehensive evaluation of a superintendent has three foundations.

(1) PROGRESS TOWARDS DISTRICT GOALS AND OBJECTIVES;
(2) DEMONSTRATION OF EXECUTIVE SKILLS;
(3) THE BOARD'S EVALUATION OF ITS OWN PERFORMANCE.

I. SCHOOL BOARD SELF-EVALUATION

The board's credibility will be enhanced if the board includes, as part of the CSA evaluation, an evaluation of itself. As part of the management team, the board and its superintendent are cooperatively and mutually accountable for the progress of the school system. When a superintendent "fails," some of the fault will be shared by the board.

A periodic, formal and informal evaluation of its operational procedures will improve the board's performance; exemplify the kind of constructive evaluations the board encourages for all school personnel and programs; and promote a spirit of teamwork throughout the district.

A board review of its performance will allow the board to make some judgements as to whether individual members or the board as a whole have held up their end of the governance/management relationship. The board does not want to find itself in the position of causing the superintendent to fail because of board actions, or lack of actions.

II. DEMONSTRATION OF EXECUTIVE SKILLS

While the board's primary concern should be whether the superintendent is making progress towards district objectives, the board will also want to concern itself with the leadership style of the superintendent (executive skills), perceived as: Is he leading the district in the "right" way in the "right" direction? Is he meeting the board's expectations in this area? A superintendent's effectiveness is, in large measure, related to the character of his or her leadership or "management style." No one style is best for all. Expectations vary from district-to-district, and are best served by different approaches to management.

For example: A chief school administrator who has worked long and hard to improve relations with the local media may be able to point to positive stories about the district accomplishments, but cannot deal with any quantitative specifics. Furthermore, as board members well know, even good media relations do not prevent unfavorable stories from appearing.

In addition, a board must also consider its own actions and their impact on the CSA's performance. For example, if your board demands that the CSA reduce teaching staff by 10% and reassign the remaining teachers, expect an impact on staff morale. Know that morale will be low and don't blame the CSA on the evaluation. You set the priority. You demanded that it be implemented. You must take the blame for the fallout.

Traditionally, superintendents have been evaluated on the basis of some checklist of such characteristics or roles. The board completes what amounts to a survey on which each member rates the superintendent in various categories.

Ratings are either on a numbered scale or something like "outstanding", "satisfactory", "needs improvement" and "unsatisfactory." The ratings are totalled, divided by the number of people submitting them, and an average of some sort is produced. The assumption is that the average represents the board's collective judgment of the quality of performance.

The shortcomings of such a system, when used alone, is that it does not provide information for either the superintendent or the "record" about the basis for those judgments. It also fails to address whether the superintendent accomplished <u>what</u> was expected. It merely describes how he

or she went about doing whatever it was they did. However, as one part of a three part evaluation program, it can provide an opportunity for the board and the superintendent to assess "perceptions" of how the superintendent is performing.

Because many such checklists and rating scales are available, there is no need to reinvent the wheel. But, it is important for the board and superintendent to review samples and "customize" a list that reflects their values and expectations. With this in mind, a summary of ratings, rather than a misleading average, can serve a useful purpose.

Whenever an outstanding or an unsatisfactory rating is given, the board should provide the basis for those judgments. Give examples; list the specifics that lead you to those conclusions.

Make sure the instrument reflects important elements of the CSA's job description and clearly defines those skills that the board intends to evaluate. For example, if the board intends to concentrate on one or two particular skills, such as communications or public relations, this should be made clear at the beginning of the year. Evaluations are most effective and beneficial to the district when the board and the CSA understand and agree upon what is to be evaluated.

Keep rating scales simple so that they can be easily understood and used. Rating scales which are very broad, form 1 to 12 for example, become very subjective. One board member automatically eliminates the top numbers; another, the bottom. One will not rate above 5; the next never rates below it. Then there is the board member who feels the scale is not descriptive enough and therefore uses 5-1/2, 6-3/4, 2-2/3.

Executive skills are judgmental. They are based on perception -- perceptions cannot be quantified on a scale of 1 to 12. Executive skills are also specific to your district's job description. The category "not applicable" is definitely not applicable to your Executive Skills instrument. If the item doesn't apply, it should not be part of the evaluation.

Use a simple system:

- satisfactory
- unsatisfactory
- commendable or
- don't know.

Make sure that your "Executive Skills" document is well written; group skills into broad categories; evaluate items within the CSA's control; and eliminate items that cannot be evaluated.

To summarize, an Executive Skills document should:

- be clear and reasonable,
- reflect the job description and district needs,
- be specific and complete,
- require examples whenever possible, and
- group skills into broad categories.

It should avoid:

- complex and confusing scales,
- prejorative words such as "grossly incompetent,"
- nitpicking nonessential items,
- items that are "not applicable" or cannot be evaluated, and
- addressing personal traits as "executive skills."

Remember, any document used should be modified to suit your district's needs. Then the document, and your expectations, should be shared with your CSA. Your purpose is not to trap or embarrass your CSA, it is to judge performance fairly for the benefit of student learning.

Compiling and Analyzing the Data

A. Board president (designate) or consultant has the responsibility to make sure that each board member receives a copy of the "Executive Skills" document by the first week in March.

B. Board members have the responsibility to complete the document, individually and return it to the board president for tabulation by March 15th.

C. The board president tabulates the individual evaluations and compiles a composite. The composite and the narrative report of the results of the evaluation will be presented to the board for review at the board's pre-annual summary conference meeting, scheduled no later than March 30th.

D. The composite should reflect all of the ratings of each board member on each item numerically, including written comments for those items which received unsatisfactory or commendable ratings.

E. The narrative report should include as a minimum:

1. Overall results, e.g., "A majority of the board finds your demonstration of executive skills to be satisfactory, unsatisfactory," etc.

2. The results by categories, e.g., "A majority of the board finds your performance satisfactory in the following categories: Ability to Manage, and ...., and unsatisfactory in Ability to Make Decisions," etc.

3. Identify major areas of strength (selected areas which received "commendable" ratings).

4. Identify major areas of weakness (selected areas which received poor or unsatisfactory ratings).

5. Areas in which the board was divided.

F. The pre-conference meeting of the board, should be held (by March 30) without the CSA. Up until now the board members have provided their "individual judgments." The pre-conference meeting will be the first opportunity for the board to review and come to grips with the "collective judgment" of the entire board. During the review process the board should pay particular attention to those areas of evaluation in which the board was divided.

The information provided in both the "Demonstration of Executive Skills" and "Progress Towards District Goals and Objectives" should serve as the basis for the Annual Written Performance Report.

III. PROGRESS TOWARDS DISTRICT GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Holding the superintendent accountable for progress towards achieving district goals and objectives requires the board to establish goals and objectives that are clear, realistic and measurable. The board must communicate effectively to the superintendent what their expectations are and then evaluate the results and outcomes.

A. Definitions, Goals and Objectives

Goals can be defined as written statements of educational aspirations for learner achievement and the educational process stated in general terms.

They are usually of two types: outcome goals and process goals. Outcome goals reflect something the student should be, have, or be able to do as a result (at least in part) of his/her experience in school. Process goals reflect something schools should be, have, or do so that students best achieve their goals.

Objectives are written statements of the intended outcomes of a specific educational process. (What do you expect the student to be able to do?) Objectives can also be defined as one of a series of intermediate steps that must be accomplished in the plan to achieve the district goals.

B. Establishing Goals and Objectives

1. Purposes - Establishment of goals and objectives serve a multiplicity of purposes:

a. Serve to define and give direction to the district's educational programs.
b. Be used as part of a formalized process to evaluate the superintendent.
c. Be used to assess student progress.
d. Be used to evaluate the district i.e., T & E monitoring process.
e. Be used by the board/community to assess the effectiveness of the board.

Finally, they can serve as the basis for developing a "mission statement." A mission statement is a multi-year plan of what the district hopes to accomplish (priorities), how it expects to go about it, and the resources needed to accomplish the plan.

2. Sources - The board, in cooperation with the superintendent (CSA), establishes the goals and objectives. They may be established on a yearly or multi-year basis. They can come from several sources. They can be extracted from the board's mission statement.

They can result from T & E goals/objectives. They can be identified by looking at the superintendent's job description and deciding what needs to be done in each area of responsibility. They can emerge from board discussions of what needs to be done. They can come from last year's evaluation. They can be developed from a community/staff survey designed to identify issues and concerns. They can be derived from a district audit which compares district practices to established standards.

Regardless of its source, it is important to remember that when the board and the superintendent disagree about an objective, the board has the final say.

3. The Goal Setting Process - This process can best be viewed in five steps:

Step I - The board must call a meeting for the express purpose of establishing the board's goals and objectives for the next school year.

May is a good month to hold the session immediately following the annual evaluation of the superintendent. At this time, the district needs are fresh in the minds of the board members. The board should plan a session of two to three hours. A Saturday morning meeting from 9:00 a.m. to 12:00 noon would be ideal.

Step II - The board president (designate) or consultant list all ideas on newsprint for the board's consideration. At this point, all ideas are considered valid - no judgments are made.

Step III - In Step III, each statement is examined for its clarity and purpose; how realistic the objective is; and whether or not it can be measured. This review will cause the board to focus on the really important needs while eliminating the less important.

Step IV - The board should attempt to gain consensus on each of the remaining proposals. Failing this, the board should take a majority vote. Every attempt should be made to reduce the list of proposals to a workable number for best results.

Step V - The remaining objectives should be placed in priority order and weighed. If the board finds this task too difficult, try to place them into two groups: essential and very important. Grouping and weighing is an important part of the process because it may not be possible to accomplish all the objectives. Knowing what the board's priorities, in advance, are will help the superintendent make the best use of his time, money and resources in a pinch.

C. Developing The Action Plan(s)

The establishment of the goals and objectives is a clear statement to the superintendent what the board's expectations are. The board must now hold the superintendent accountable for accomplishing its objectives. The board will still need to know what's involved in carrying out the objectives and how the superintendent plans to proceed. The board should direct the superintendent to develop an action plan for each of the objectives.

1. Each action plan would describe:

   a. The major activities involved in achieving the objective
   b. Target dates when each major activity will be accomplished
   c. Staff responsibility and resources needed
   d. Consequences for the board and the district
   e. Indicators of success (What outcomes, events, products or services will indicate that the goal/objective has been achieved).

   The superintendent brings the action plan(s) back to the board. The board reviews each plan and, through discussion, it is approved, modified or dropped.

2. The board, in its review, should ask the following questions:

   a. Will the major activities listed achieve the objective?
   b. Are the timelines for each activity realistic and logical?
   c. Is staff responsibility clearly delineated?
   d. Are there sufficient resources to accomplish the intended purposes?
   e. Are the results/outcomes measurable?

3. What do we do if the Superintendent does not respond favorably?

If the plans, presented by the superintendent, are unacceptable, direct that they be revised by an established date, and be very specific about the revisions. If no plans are submitted by the superintendent by an established date, for no acceptable reason, the superintendent is insubordinate, which can serve as the basis for a personnel action.

Boards and superintendents often work poorly together because of failures in communications. Communicating effectively is crucial to a good board/superintendent relationship. These failures to communicate serve to erode understanding of each other's roles, and mutual respect which are critical elements in a sound board/superintendent relationship.

4. Here are some tips on how to improve your communications with your superintendent:

   a. Be very clear; specific; and where possible, give examples of what your expectations are.

   b. Establish reasonable timelines for when you expect the results.

   c. Sharpen your listening skills. Make sure that the message sent is the message received.

   d. Board president should get into the habit of summarizing for the superintendent and the record what is to be done and follow it up in writing on really important issues.

   e. Communicate to the superintendent as a board, not on an individual basis.

   f. Follow up.

D. Monitoring Progress During the School Year

The path toward accomplishing the objectives has already been laid out in the action plan. Target dates for the major activities serve as the schedule for progress reports.

However, it would be a good idea for the board to establish a minimum of three (3) dates to review progress. The superintendent should be directed to prepare a written report for each meeting outlining what has been accomplished to date. Not only would the three (3) meetings meet the requirement to evaluate a nontenured superintendent three (3) times a year, but the reports might also indicate the need for a "course correction." Not only is this okay --- it is desirable.

E. Evaluating the Results

Evaluation is identifying, collecting, interpreting and providing information for the purpose of judging effectiveness.

The word judging is underlined because evaluation requires you to make a decision, and at this point, that decision requires judgment. The information provided in the action plan will not guarantee that your decisions will be good ones. However, the consideration of good information is likely to increase the probability that your decisions will be sound. The key really is to determine what decisions you have to make, and what information you need in order to make them.

1. The Annual Summary Conference (Summative Evaluation)

Did the superintendency do its job? Did the superintendency fulfill its responsibilities? Did the superintendency accomplish the board's objectives to the board's satisfaction? The board's responsibility is to determine whether it is satisfied with the progress made towards the objectives. Progress is continuous. Sometimes, even with formative evaluation, an objective will not be achieved. Sometimes, an objective will have been only partially achieved. The superintendent's responsibility in such instances is to provide a satisfactory explanation as to why. The board must collectively judge whether the reasons given for not meeting the objective are satisfactory. Satisfaction is a value judgment. At this point, the evaluation process clearly becomes subjective. If the system has been working right, this should not happen too often. But, when it does, the board must recognize its roles and responsibilities and, if necessary, by majority vote, make up its collective mind.

2. Preparing for the Summary Conference

The annual summary conference should be held by April 30th, in order to meet the requirements of N.J.A.C. 6:3-1.22, which requires boards of education to evaluate the CSA annually.

a. Distribution of evaluation forms - Board president should see to it that each board member receives a list of the objectives on the evaluation form (Exhibit "A" or "B") by the first week in March. Each board member makes his own, individual assessment, and returns the form to the board president by March 15th.

b. Compiling and Analyzing the Data - The board president tabulates the individual assessments and compiles a composite. The composite combines the judgments of each board member on each objective. Written comments from board members

should be listed with each objective unedited. Objectives rated as not achieved or partially achieved should be noted for discussion at the annual conference on March 30th.

The CSA should be notified before the conference that the achievement of certain objectives are in question. This will give the CSA the option of bringing documentation to the conference to support his arguments.

c. Pre-Conference Meeting - Prior to March 30th the board meets, without the superintendent, to review the composites submitted by the president, and to resolve any areas of disagreement. At this point, the board makes no final decisions; seeks clarity and understanding of results.

3. Conducting the Annual Summary Conference

The board meets with the superintendent (CSA) to give its assessment of his/her "progress towards district goals and objectives." The board president (or designate) is careful to review the achieved areas first in order to set a positive tone. The unsatisfactory (not achieved) or partially achieved areas are discussed last.

Board members join in the discussion of the not achieved or partially achieved areas being careful not to argue with the superintendent. The board's primary concern here is to raise concerns; ask clarifying questions; and allow the CSA the opportunity to respond.

The board should discuss with the superintendent the area(s) of weaknesses to be included in the superintendent's Professional Improvement Plan (PIP). The board having identified area(s) in need of improvement should let the superintendent determine the specifics of the PIP (action plans). Timelines for the completion of the PIP should be mutually agreed upon and recorded in the Written Performance Report.

The Board meets without the superintendent to make final judgments - agree or disagree on superintendent's accomplishments. The board should seek consensus on each undecided objective. Failing this, a majority vote is required. This represents the "collective judgment" of the board. There are no "minority opinions."

The board president should seek guidance from the board on what to highlight in the written performance report, including recommendations for professional growth of the superintendent.

The board should set a deadline for the board president to complete the written report for final board approval, prior to April 30th.

F. The Annual, Written Performance Report

The report must be completed by April 30th. The board must meet by that date in order to review the president's written report, which must include:

1. Areas of strength.
2. Areas of weakness.
3. Recommendations for professional growth.
4. Summary of available indicators of pupil progress and growth.
5. Statement of how these indicators relate to the effectiveness of the overall program and the effectiveness of the CSA.

After board approval, a copy of the report is mailed or hand delivered to the CSA by the board president, and a second copy is filed in a designated place in the district, or with the board's attorney. No individual board members should retain copies.

The CSA has ten (10) working days to add additional data, not previously seen by the board, to the report.

G. Summary

1. Superintendent Evaluation Planning Cycle

May - June	- Board/CSA establish goals and objectives
July - August	- CSA/Staff develop action plans
September	- Board reviews and adopts action plans
October - March	- Board monitors progress
March - April	- Annual Summary Conference

2. Annual Summary Conference - Calendar

February 24 - 28	- Distribute evaluation forms to board
March 3 - 7	- Deadline for return of individual assessments
March 14	- Board president completes composite
March 17 - 21	- Board meets to review results
March 24 - 28	- Annual Summary Conference
April 11	- Board president completes written performance report
April 14 - 25	- Board reviews final report and submits to superintendent

3. Annual Summary Conference - Agenda

5:30 - 6:30 P.M. - Dinner
6:30 - 8:00 P.M. - Review results with CSA
8:00 - 9:15 P.M. - Board makes final decisions
9:15 - 10:00 P.M.- Discussion - written performance report

The process of establishing board goals and objectives and holding the superintendent accountable for progress towards those goals and objectives is enhanced considerably by a good board/superintendent relationship, where there exists respect for the differences between governance and management and a common understanding of their proper interaction.

This three-part approach to superintendent evaluation: 1) Progress Towards District Goals and Objectives; 2) Demonstration of Executive Skills; and 3) Board Self-Evaluation, will not happen overnight. It takes a lot of hard work, patience and commitment to make it work.

But it will be worth it to the board when you consider the benefits: improved communications; higher level of trust; and a sound basis for making decisions.

SJB/JL:nf/4036
NJSBA CSA Evaluation
5/87